Nation

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THE CREE VOTE COUNTS

The power to choose Page 3

Crees can be major political force, says Grand Chief Page 10

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From Chief Norman Hardisty Jr. and council

VOTE

By Will Nicholls

Why vote? It's a question many people ask themselves when elections roll around. While voter turnouts for Cree elections and referendums are healthy, our participation in federal and provincial campaigns is dismal.

Most Cree are eligible to vote in the riding of Ungava. But most of us don't and that's a shame, because we have the power of numbers to determine the winner. The last Quebec election in 2012 saw only an 1153-vote difference between the two top candidates. So when you ask if your vote means something the answer is overwhelmingly, yes, it does.

Simple mathematics shows that we could easily make the difference in Ungava. In 2012, almost 8900 Crees were eligible to vote, but only 1195 ballots were cast in the nine communities.

That's only 13.5% of us, which may explain why the Ungava riding as a whole had by far the lowest turnout in the province – far lower than the provincial average of 74%.

Now think what would happen if two-thirds or more of us had cast a ballot. Our numbers would easily overcome the 1153-vote difference between the two top candidates in 2012. Back in 2012 the entire number of eligible voters for Ungava was 26,098. Crees represent 34% of that number.

So the Cree vote does count. Only 10,663 people voted in Ungava in the 2012 Quebec election. If the 7500 Crees who stayed home had showed up, we would have easily been able to make our choices count.

Calling on people to exercise a hard-won right isn't enough. Almost unbelievably, Aboriginal people in Quebec did not have the right to vote until 1969. It's often said if you don't exercise a right then you are in danger of losing it. The past doesn't really influence people to head out to the polling station though so I'll try to provide a few important reasons to make the effort.

I've heard people complain that politicians don't really listen to the Cree. Well if we don't bother to vote then our voice will not be heard by the person elected to represent the Ungava riding. It's a fact that politicians look at who votes and what they say. So if we don't vote then we are basically telling them that we don't care what they do while in office. That is not a safe thing to tell them.

Taking time off work is allowed by law and putting your mark on a ballot tells candidates we think and care about decisions that affect our lives and region. This is democracy in action and voting allows us to express our idea of how things should be done.

Perhaps in the next election a Cree could take a page from Romeo Saganash's notebook and run in the provincial election. An increase in Cree voter turnout would make things interesting but that's four years away.

We need to begin now to make our voices heard in the only way we can and that's by voting in this election. Given our numbers any elected candidate will listen closely to our concerns. It was best expressed 2000 year ago by the Greek philosopher Pericles, who said, "We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business: we say he has no business here at all."

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Mashable potatos

by Sonny Orr

There's a lot happening these days and sometimes I wonder when all the doom and gloom will go away and something nice will happen. Perhaps it has a lot to do with the immediacy of the worldwide reaction to just about anything that can be put on the Internet. Sometimes I like to call it the worldwide circus, as any old Joe or Jane can win immediate international attention for acting like a clown. All this reactionary explosion of information, a lot that has nothing really to do about anything, catches and splits our ever-diminishing attention spans into nano seconds of concentration. At least for those of us with high-speed access.

In the old days, television was the devil in disguise and it was all-out war when it came to ratings, remember those things? Ratings were random surveys conducted to see what we were watching on television at any given time and would be used as an ad-marketing tool for big TV networks. Anyways, I was never surveyed nor did I ever meet anyone who was. Today, that information is available for any fool to use. At one time, though, wild-eyed fear gripped society that, some day, nearly everyone would have a TV set and loll around until they became mashed couch potatoes.

Thanks to the Internet, potatoes, besides being a side order for everything, are slowly becoming extinct. The WWW has rapidly taken eliminated the passive potato role and forced everyone to become self-conscious of how they look. Thus the need for exercise machines to improve our selfies. Even bathrooms will need to be cleaned up a bit as the selfie seems to occupy the lavatory a lot these days. One's private sanctums are now becoming public for anyone interested in Joe or Jane's shampoo and other hygiene products in the background.

Incredibly, this has led to a radical change in the way we view our privacy. Now our lives are an open book for anyone who wants to know. Heck, there are surveillance secrets on Facebook than Ed Snowden could ever hope to collect. So why bother with hiding anything when most posts are nearly full disclosures anyways. As one buddy of mine used to say on Facebook, "Breathe in… breathe out" – just to show he was still alive in cyberspace.

For a while, people feared that online betting would take over the world, but the new generation of thrill seekers just can't see themselves glassy eyed and crippled with casinoitus for hours on end. Remember, the attention span.

So what lies in store for the future generations of our people? Will we be master miners and logging champions? Will we stand the test of time and last in an age where anything a year old is ancient history?

Remember, today is the time when you get the news before the news gets the news. We are the news. Not so surprisingly, more and more people are getting on the news using anything that can record visually. That 15 minutes of fame really is an eternity today as news flashes simple format videos endlessly until a new one arrives. Fodder for the inquisitive mind may be another's fertilizer.

Lastly, the news just ain't the news unless Rob Ford is in it!

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CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
A. C. Bednarzig, A. Levitas, J. East,
A. German, J. Staniforth, S. Orr, X. Kataquapit,

PHOTOGRAPHY
A. German, N. Diamond,
W. Nicholls, D. Valade

SALES REPRESENTATIVES
Danielle Valade, Juno Landry

DESIGN AND LAYOUT
R. Lawson

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WHERE TO REACH US:
POSTMASTER:
The Nation PRODUCTION OFFICE
4529 CLARK, #403, MONTREAL, QC., H2T 2T3
EDITORIAL & ADS
TEL.: 514-272-3077, FAX: 514-278-9914
The Nation HEAD OFFICE
P.O. BOX 151, CHISASIBI, QC. J0M 1E0
www.nationnews.ca
E-MAIL ADDRESSES:
Editorial: nation@nationnews.ca
news@nationnews.ca
Ads: for Danielle Valade
ads@nationnews.ca
for Ginette Gregoire
publicity@nationnews.ca
Classifieds: news@nationnews.ca

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Marching together

Val d'Or residents celebrate its annual anti-racism week

Story by Amy German Photos by Kevin Cordeau

This year's anti-racism activities in Val d'Or began with major victory for the city's Native Friendship Centre. Just as the event was kicked off March 17, the municipal government announced it would fund the Kijaté, a social-housing project that will now see the construction of a 24-unit building for Aboriginal families.

After almost five years of fighting for the project, Val d'Or Friendship Centre Executive Director Edith Cloutier said she cried out in delight upon hearing the news.

"I don't know if the announcement was meant to coincide with the anti-racism week but the mayor and council did mention this fact when they made the announcement at a public assembly where the resolution was adopted," said Cloutier.

The city of Val d'Or will provide the land for the project as well as a 35-year tax exemption, a yearly participation in the Rent Supplement Program (RSP) and a $100,000 investment. The project will also receive Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) subsidies along with funds raised by the Friendship Centre.

The good news set the tone for a successful week, featuring a wide variety of activities that culminated in the annual Gabriel-Commanda Walk. The march down Val d'Or's main street March 21 drew about 1800 people of all ages, races and walks of life come together to stand together against racism.

Under a sky of bright sunshine and warmth for so early on in the spring, buses arrived bringing Elders and other participants from Lac Simon, Kitcisakik and Pikogan to march alongside people from all walks of life in Val d'Or, including the sweet and smiling faces of many of the city's daycare and school children.

The presence of these children has come to be expected at the march. Since the event was first started, the week of activities has also become part of school curriculum throughout the city.

Hosting the event this year were Val d'Or Mayor Pierre Corbeil, NDP MP Romeo Saganash and PQ MNA Elizabeth LaRouche, who was also Quebec's Aboriginal Affairs Minister before the current election campaign was called last month.

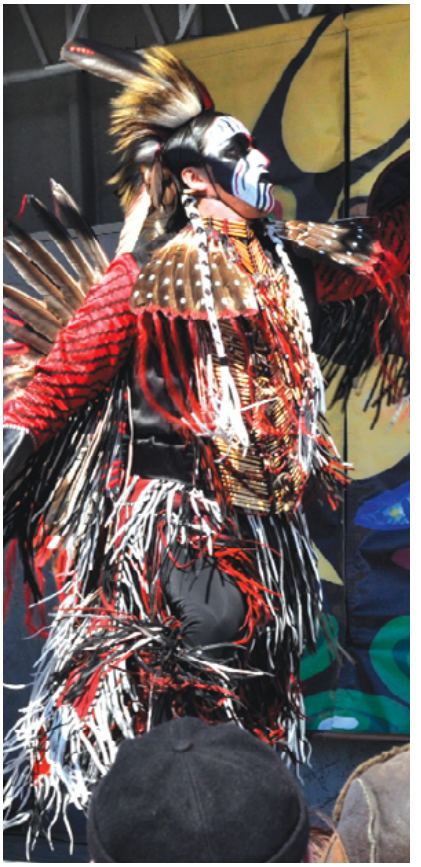
"We chose people who represented the citizens for this year's campaign because our message was to see how we could increase citizen involvement in changing our society and bringing down the walls of racism in our society," said Cloutier.

The Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) also hosted anti-racism events largely geared at its student population. This year UQAT invited Innu singer/songwriter Florent Vollant to participate and perform at the conference.

"We had a traditional show that featured traditional drummers, dancers and a protocol with our spokespeople and Elders. Florent Vollent came out and sang with a group of women doing hand drumming. It was just so beautiful to start out everything," said Cloutier.

She described the event as a coming together of Nations, with participants walking hand in hand, respecting each other's differences and acknowledging that racism has no place in Val d'Or. There are now just as many non-Natives as Natives who attend the event, walking strong and harmoniously together.

At one point during the walk, Cloutier said Vollant told her how amazed he was because when that many Natives are out marching in the streets, it is usually because they are protesting.



Defending the indefensible

Cindy Blackstock on the federal government's case at the Human Rights Tribunal

by Jesse Staniforth

Cindy Blackstock is the executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, which filed a Human Rights complaint in 2007 against the federal government over chronic underfunding of First Nations child welfare programs. As a result, Blackstock believes she's become a target for the federal government's lawyers – and its spies. Government agents famously stalked her and her Facebook pages were hacked.

Despite furious efforts to evade the case, successive court decisions forced the federal government into the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, which began hearing evidence in March 2013. Last March 17, the government began its defence. At the end of that week, *the Nation* reached Cindy Blackstock to discuss the government's case.

The Nation: What have been the major events that you've seen take place in the Human Rights Tribunal this week?

Cindy Blackstock: I'd say the denial of any wrongdoing on the part of the government. Given 14 volumes of largely their own documents that show [the inequality between funding directed to Aboriginal children in child welfare], I was surprised that it was a flat-out denial.

And then they put their first witness on the stand – a fine lady, I'm sure – but what was surprising to me was the fact that she said they had just discovered in 2012 that First Nations agencies in Canada do their own receiving of child-welfare reports and investigations, and they had not been funding that before. The program has been in place for some 30 years.

We filed this case in 2007. Today, the federal government was asked how long families have to wait to get relief and prevention services. Their answer is, "We don't know." But these are little children growing up *right now*. Since we've filed this case, some children who were just born at the time of the filing have had their seventh birthday. And there's still no benchmark as to when the federal government is going to treat these kids equally.

TN: But if that was 1967, that was after the end of the era of Indian Agents coming to take children from their families.

CB: That's right. So that same practice was alive and well. Social workers would be serving on the admissions committees of these residential schools and these kids would be coming in by the dozen. And that's before the 60s Scoop.

Now, they're being removed and placed in foster care at far higher rates than ever before. We were talking about Saskatchewan this week, and an agency director told me that when he started in 1994, about 57% of the kids in that province's child welfare system were First Nations. Now it's well over 85%. We're seeing it across the country: First Nations children are making up far more of the kids in care, but we have to take the federal government to court in order to treat these children equitably, and to give their families a chance to be able to care for them safely in their communities and their homes.

Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society

TN: In light of news about the federal government's handling of the St. Anne's Residential School documents, it's hard not to conclude that the government is either totally incompetent or that they're trying to cover something up.

CB: I'm very concerned to see the number of court actions against the federal government involving Aboriginal children or those who are now adults. In the case of St. Anne's, they were found to be withholding documents unlawfully. And of course the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had to take them to court to get them to release documents.

In our case, we were about two months into the hearings when I got an Access to Information disc that included critical evaluations of one of their funding formulas, and it showed significant problems that they had never dis-

closed. It turned out that they had failed to disclose 100,000 documents.

If the federal government wants to put the interests of First Nations children at the forefront, then I think there are some pretty hard questions about their actions in these legal cases. Why did they engage in six years of delay tactics if they really believe that they did nothing wrong? If I was accused of a crime I didn't do, I'd be really eager for the hearing to clear my name!

> "Today, the federal government was asked how long families have to wait to get relief and prevention services. Their answer is, "We don't know." But these are little children growing up *right now.* "

TN: It's been four days of government defense at this point. What are you feeling?

CB: In my view, I think the case that these kids are being discriminated against has strengthened exponentially over these last four days. What is discouraging is the lack of diligence in terms of making sure within the federal government that they're actually making the best decisions for children.

When I was testifying, we had a chart showing the number of days that First Nations children had spent in foster care, where the department has paid. Some children just come into care, and they're through overnight. Others, it's for many years.

I'm not a utopian thinker. I know some First Nations children cannot grow up with their families safely. But why is it that we're at a place in this country that a First Nations child is about 12 times more likely to end up in foster care than a non-Aboriginal child, and then within that we actually give those children less money? There's something wrong with that.

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Snowmobiler's death linked to alcohol and speed

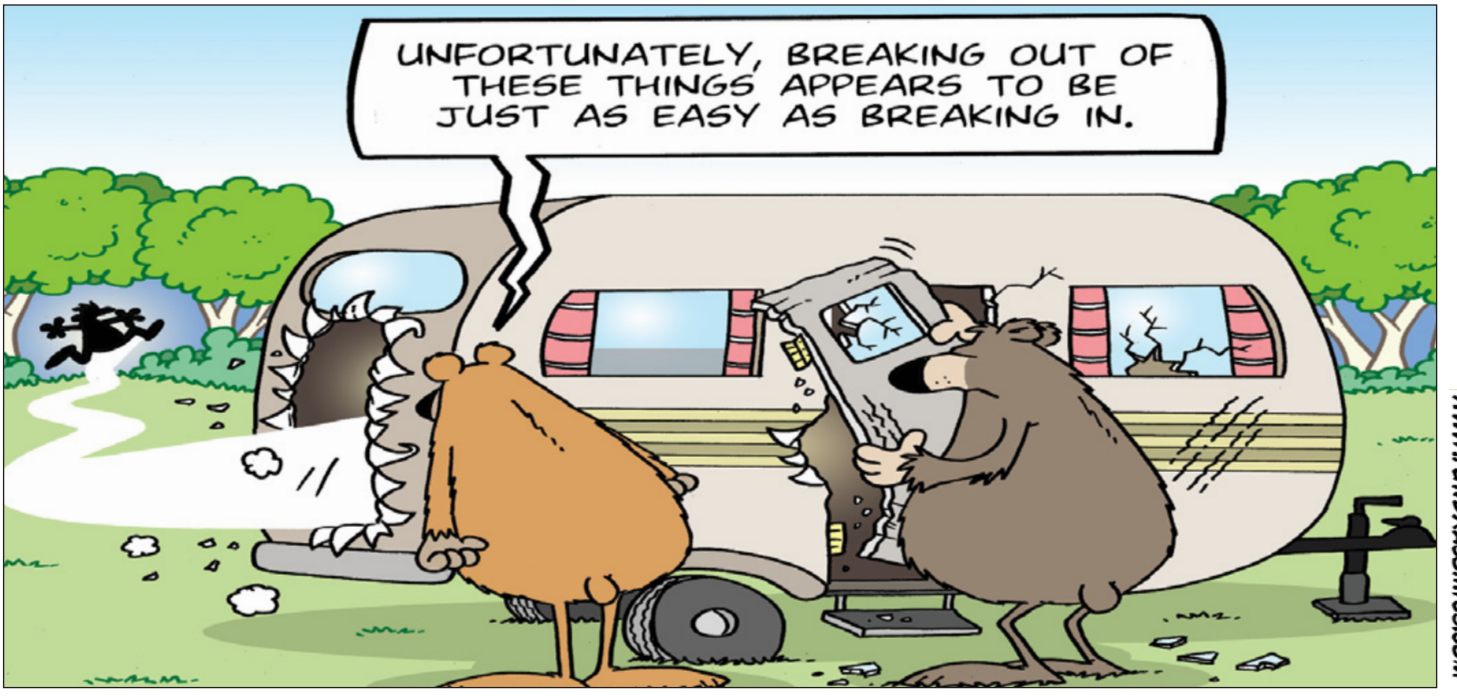
Mistissini resident Matthew Coonishish died after being crushed by his friend's snowmobile March 18 as they were riding on Waconichi Lake near Chibougamou. The Sûreté du Québec attributed the accident to impaired driving at high speeds by both vehicle operators.

The tragedy adds another number to grim statistics in Quebec's winter pastime. Since 2007, 6,000 people have been hospitalized for snowmobiling-related injuries. The numbers also reveal that adult males in their early 40s are the most prone to snowmobiling accidents.

Quebec law, the strictest in Canada, requires helmets for riders as well as towed passengers. Although most accidents happen out of either bad luck or negligence, some can be entirely avoided by educating the public of the dangers while operating a snowmobile while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Unfortunately, stories such as Coonishish's serve as a stark reminder to the dangers of the sport.

photos: Lyle Stewart

A protest by Tyendinaga Mohawks in Marysville, Ontario, drew attention to the tragedy of missing and murdered Aboriginal women March 19 by disrupting all CP and Via Rail service between Montreal and Toronto for the day. Led by a grassroots group of determined young women, protesters said they were angry over with the refusal by the Harper government to strike an inquiry into the 824 known cases of missing and murdered Native women.



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Frank talk about exercising our franchise

A discussion with Grand Chief Coon Come on the Quebec election

by Amy German

As voting day in Quebec looms amid rumours of a referendum and whether First Nations issues are being addressed or if treaty lands would even stay part of the province, the Nation felt that it was time to check in with Cree leadership to get an official perspective from Eeyou Istchee.

Discussing First Nations stereotypes, voting in this election, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and what would happen with the Cree in the event of yet another referendum, *the Nation* spoke with the Grand Chief.

The Nation (TN): There is a notion in this province that Natives don't vote; do you think that this is true about the Cree?

Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come (GC): I think that is just a perception and certainly doesn't apply to the Cree Nation. We had a very good turnout in our recent elections for Grand Chief/Deputy Grand Chief; we had a good turnout for important referendums in recent years including the Eeyou Marine Region Agreement and the last referendum on Quebec secession. I think that, increasingly, our people understand what the issues are, what candidates stand for, and they are engaged as citizens should be in deciding on what is best for the future of the Cree Nation.

TN: Why should they vote?

GC: I have always encouraged our people to exercise their right to vote. As our population continues to grow our votes have a greater impact on the outcome of elections. We can, through our voting, make decisions that are beneficial to our Cree Nation and to our communities.

It is through our votes that we can send a clear message to governments about what our needs are, what our preferences are and what we consider to be in our own interest. Increasingly, the Cree Nation is becoming the major political force in our region and we can, through our votes, actually make a difference. It is an opportunity to make changes that can be to our benefit. I have encouraged our people to be involved in any forum, venue or arena where there is the possibility of advancing the interests of the Cree Nation.

TN: Do you feel that these parties are doing enough to woo First Nations votes?

GC: In general, I would say that historically Aboriginal people have been largely ignored in electoral politics. Too often, electoral boundaries have been configured in such a way as to ensure the minority status of our people across the country. In spite of this gerrymandering practice there are areas where the population of Aboriginal people is still increasing and where they cannot be ignored in electoral politics. Wherever there is a voting bloc that can make a difference in any election that is where we will see political parties showing up.

I also believe that Aboriginal people will play an increasing role in the way in which resource development takes place on the traditional territories of Aboriginal people. This reality will translate eventually into an increasing interest on everyone's part in involving our communities in electoral politics. The fact that we now have a Cree MP in Parliament, Romeo Saganash, is an expression of this emerging reality for Aboriginal people across the country. I like to think that the Cree Nation is showing the way in this arena.

TN: From where you are sitting, what is the most important issue for the Crees in this election?

GC: Our most important immediate concerns are to make sure that the initiatives we have begun and the progress we have made continue. We need to see a commitment by all parties to fully implement the Governance Agreement and to continue to implement the Paix des Braves as well as other agreements. There is also a num-

THROUGH OUR VOTES WE CAN SEND A CLEAR MESSAGE TO GOVERNMENTS ABOUT WHAT OUR NEEDS ARE. THE CREE NATION IS BECOMING THE MAJOR POLITICAL FORCE IN OUR REGION AND WE CAN ACTUALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

ber of other files where initial progress has been made and these also need to progress.

From a larger perspective, we have always, and we will continue to be extremely vigilant in ensuring that our fundamental rights are respected and that no initiatives that erode or diminish our rights gain any foothold.

TN: Because of the treaty and subsequent agreements that the Cree have signed, what kind of an impact does a change in government have on Eeyou Istchee?

GC: A change in government does not necessarily imply any impact on Eeyou Istchee, our agreements or our rights. Since the signing of the Paix des Braves we have lived through two subsequent governments in Quebec and we have been able to make progress throughout those changes with each new government. We have strengthened the nation-to-nation relationship between the Cree Nation and Quebec with each successive Quebec government, and I expect this will continue.

The only factor that can cause us concern is the platform upon which any political party campaigns and the policies and initiatives that may be put in place after an election. We will be very concerned if we hear anything that could have a detrimental effect on our rights and on what we have gained until now. As I mentioned, we will remain vigilant and alert to any measure which could have a negative impact on Cree rights or which could negatively impact the agreements we have concluded with Quebec, and we will not hesitate to act accordingly.

TN: Ever since the moment that Pierre Karl Péladeau dropped the sovereignty bomb, there has been much talk about what this would actually mean. Because the JBNQA is federal, would Cree territory remain part of Canada?

GC: Before we speak of the JBNQA, it is important for me to mention the most fundamental point: Eeyou Istchee is the home of the Cree Nation, and we have lived here as a people since time immemorial. The Cree territory is also subject to the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, which is a covenant among three primary government parties – the Crees, Quebec and Canada. The JBNQA is a fundamental constitutional document, a constitutionally protected treaty, which cannot be unilaterally altered or modified by any one of the parties. Amendments, modifications and

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changes to the JBNQA cannot be carried out by any party acting alone.

During the era of the last referendum on Quebec secession in the mid-1990s, we expressed our position on what secession would mean to the Cree Nation very clearly. We asserted our rights as a nation, as a people with the inalienable right of self-determination. We made it known that we would decide for ourselves, and that fundamental decisions about our political status and our territory would not be made without our consent and participation. We held our own referendum at that time, and 97% of our Cree population let it be known that we as a people would not consent to the Quebec government separating the James Bay Crees and Cree traditional territory from Canada in the event of a Yes vote in the Quebec referendum.

In short, the Cree position is that without the explicit, informed and prior consent of the Cree people, there can be no secession by Quebec which has an impact on Cree territory, Cree individuals or Cree rights. The Cree Nation, and the Cree people, will not be treated as furniture which can be moved from one house to another or one jurisdiction to another – without a voice in the matter. We are not possessions of any government. We are a nation, a people possessing the right of self-determination. We will always insist on our right to decide for ourselves. We will never permit our future political status to be fundamentally altered without our consent.

The Cree Nation has experienced many changes over the last 20 years. We have built a successful and respectful nation-to-nation relationship with Quebec. But our position regarding our rights as a people has not changed: we will always fight to protect our fundamental human rights, our Aboriginal rights and our treaty rights. If the circumstances require it, we will make our own decisions, as a people, regarding what it best for us and for our lands.

TN: Is there anything else you would like to add?

GC: Yes, I would like to state very clearly that the Cree Nation has made great strides in improving relations with Quebec since the signing of the Paix des Braves in 2002. That agreement was negotiated with the PQ government under Bernard Landry. We have strengthened the nation-to-nation relationship between the Cree Nation and Quebec with each successive Quebec government since that time.

> "In short, the Cree position is that without the explicit, informed and prior consent of the Cree people, there can be no secession by Quebec which has an impact on Cree territory, Cree individuals or Cree rights. "

We have, together, created a new and workable framework of co-existence based on the acknowledgment of our rights. We have fulfilled the vision of the original James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement for us to become partners with Quebec in the development of the territory.

We have created new opportunities for the effective and democratic governance of the territory with the establishment of our unique regional government negotiated under the Liberal government of Jean Charest and we are now putting that regional government in place with the current PQ government under Pauline Marois.

We have worked with Quebec to encourage development initiatives in the territory and we have laid the framework for resource development to take place in Eeyou Istchee in a way that both respects our rights and offers attractive conditions for industry. Whether Quebec's initiative for developing the north is called the "Plan Nord" or "Le Nord Pour Tous," we will be involved, we will work closely with both industry and government, and we will work collaboratively with people in our region and throughout Quebec.

We have, together, the Crees and Quebec, set an example for the respectful inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in the fabric of society. Quebec has, over the past 15 years, shown courage in choosing a path of inclusion based upon a respectful nation-to-nation relationship, rather than continuing on a path of exclusion, strife and disharmony.

We applaud the PQ government for its approach in the discussions that led to the Paix des Braves and which, in turn, resulted in a number of other important initiatives over the past 15 years. Quebec was courageous and honourable in recognizing our Aboriginal and treaty rights and in its willingness to go down a path of honour and mutual respect. In doing so, we believe we have created a model for the rest of the country, and perhaps, the rest of the world.

It is, by far, our preference to continue building the kind of relationship we have built over the last 15 years with Quebec – a relationship built on mutual respect, inclusion and acknowledgment of Cree rights. We prefer to continue down the path that has the promise of creating "win-win" situations for ourselves, our neighbours in our region and Quebecers generally. We would hope that when it comes to its relationship with the Cree Nation, Quebec would be looking to create "win-win" situations rather than looking for "winning conditions."

Quebec votes

Each candidate for Ungava riding speaks about where they stand on the issues

by Amy German

After months of talk about the Parti Québécois' controversial Charter of Values, job losses in a declining economy, a possible referendum, mass corruption at the Charbonneau Commission and more finger-pointing than a summer at the playground, it is almost time for Quebec to vote.

Up north however, it is a completely different world for voters in Quebec's largest riding where the needs of the Cree, Inuit, Jamesiens and everyone else in this riding can only be addressed by one of their own.

For the upcoming April 7 vote, incumbent Luc Ferland will be running for the Parti Québécois (PQ) against Jean Boucher for the Quebec Liberal Party (QLP), André Richer for Québec Solidaire (QS) and Michael Cameron for the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ).

The Nation asked each candidate seven questions about what their respective party had to offer northern voters and why they were the best candidate for the Ungava riding.

The questions:

1) What is your background and why does this make you the ideal candidate for the Ungava region?
2) Why should the Parti Québécois, Liberal Party, CAQ or Québec Solidaire be elected now?
3) What is your opinion on the current referendum talk?
4) What do you and your party have to offer specifically to Aboriginal voters?
5) What do you think is the biggest issue in this election?
6) What is your plan to stimulate the economy?
7) These are racially, culturally and linguistically charged times, do you have a plan for peace among the people?

The responses to each of these questions will appear numbered under the section for each candidate. Please not that the answers below have been edited to fit the space available.

Michael Cameron, CAQ

1) Hailing from Salluit, the northernmost tip of Quebec, Michael Cameron is an Inuk who has spent much of his life working in various political capacities, including as mayor, municipal councillor and as an executive member of the Kativik Regional Government. He also keeps up his duties as chief of his volunteer fire department and being a certified first responder while maintaining a part-time job with Bell Canada.

The 42-year-old father of five and grandfather of four may not have been planning to enter provincial politics a few months ago, but he feels that this is the right time for it as his previous political experience and new-found passion for the party has him feeling that he is the right person for Ungava.

2) It was the CAQ that approached Cameron to run while shopping around for a candidate in the region. Having previously met party leader François Legault, Cameron said his interest was piqued because Legault had worked with the separatist PQ before being the head of the nationalist CAQ.

"After I learned more about them and how they are a nationalist party that wants to work with Canada and with people of every ethnicity and nationality through transparency. As this is something I truly believe in, I decided it was okay," said Cameron.

Cameron said he was thrilled when CAQ decided that he was the right fit. "I am also an Anglican and I believe in the Lord and what we do and how

Michael Cameron, CAQ

the Lord works in mysterious ways and how different doors open when other doors close," he said.

3) As far as the referendum goes, Cameron addressed the issue simply: "As an Aboriginal person, growing up we were proud to be Canadian," he said.

"I have had some of our Elders and some of our political leaders, when they found out that I was running for CAQ, tell me to advise Legault that if they ever look to separate, that Nunavik will stay within Canada and that Nunavik will hold its own referendum. We oppose the separation of Quebec."

4) According to Cameron, the CAQ can offer the region's First Nations and Inuit voters a government that is transparent. He would also like to focus on education and tax benefits for families.

"We would like to open up 500 new positions for special education staff in the schools as well as a $1500 tax return for a family of four to alleviate the tax burden – so far all of this has been going well," said Cameron.

5) Cameron said that though there are all sorts of issues on the table, from housing shortages to education, health and long-distance telecommunications, he believes that the environment and mining are big issues for the people in this riding.

"We need to ensure that we are one with the earth and that this is habitable. That the re-growth of certain vegetations, such as the lichen for the caribou, and the other vegetation for the geese is there. I hunt geese as do my sons who go out with me. We are always very worried about our environment and climate change in our region," said Cameron.

6) While he did not have a specific direction in mind for the economy, Cameron feels he is in a good position to work for the people because of his existing relationships with the Makivik Corporation and that he would talk to the people in Chibougamau and the Cree to find out what he could do for them.

At the same time, he said CAQ policy is not to waste money or go into deficit and this is why transparency is necessary.

"We want to work so that we benefit everybody, not only human beings but also the environment and our animals," said Cameron.

"Some of our Elders and some of our political leaders... tell me to advise Legault that if they ever look to separate, that Nunavik will stay within Canada and that Nunavik will hold its own referendum. We oppose the separation of Quebec."

7) In terms of peace among the people, Cameron was quick to say that as an Inuk, he is used to everyone working together to overcome obstacles.

"We shouldn't judge other individuals or other cultures on what they wear. We should all be working together and using our strengths together to be as one. We should not be looking at the weaknesses of others or their ignorance; we should be working as a team," said Cameron.

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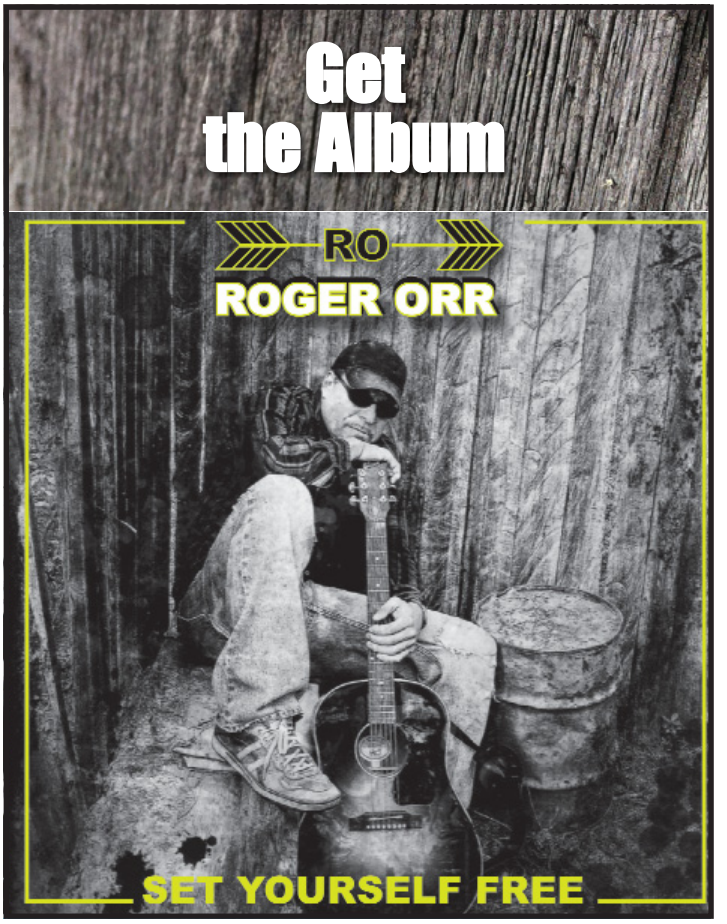

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Luc Ferland, PQ

1) Luc Ferland is the incumbent Parti Québécois MNA for the Ungava region and he is currently looking to be reelected for a fourth mandate.

"I have been a deputy since 2007 and so I am asking for a fourth mandate from the people of northern Quebec," he said.

2) According to Ferland, the PQ is the right pick for the region because they are the party that has First Nations in Quebec, particularly for the Cree under René Lévesque's mandate and also when Bernard Landry was in power as he signed the Paix des Braves Agreement.

"Under our government since the last mandate, we adopted Bill 42 which has allowed for the new Regional Government between Eeyou Istchee and James Bay to come into effect. This has happened in the last year and as the deputy for this region, I participated actively in the adoption of this law to see this government come into place," said Ferland.

Luc Ferland, PQ MNA

3) Ferland was quick to say that this vote isn't in a referendum campaign; it is an election campaign. As far as the PQ is concerned, he said this election is about issues like economic development, education and health and that PQ "star candidate" Pierre Karl Péladeau would be on hand to help Quebec entrepreneurs get a leg up and take advantage of all Quebec has to offer. He said this is something that applies equally to the Crees.

Ferland said that of course it is evident that the PQ is a sovereignist party. With this said, he insisted that now is not the time for a referendum as people are not ready and were it the case, the Cree would be consulted about it.

"If this is the case, the Cree will no doubt get all of the necessary information on the subject when the time comes. We are not there now and are very, very far away from that at this point in time. Right now we are in the middle of a traditional election," said Ferland.

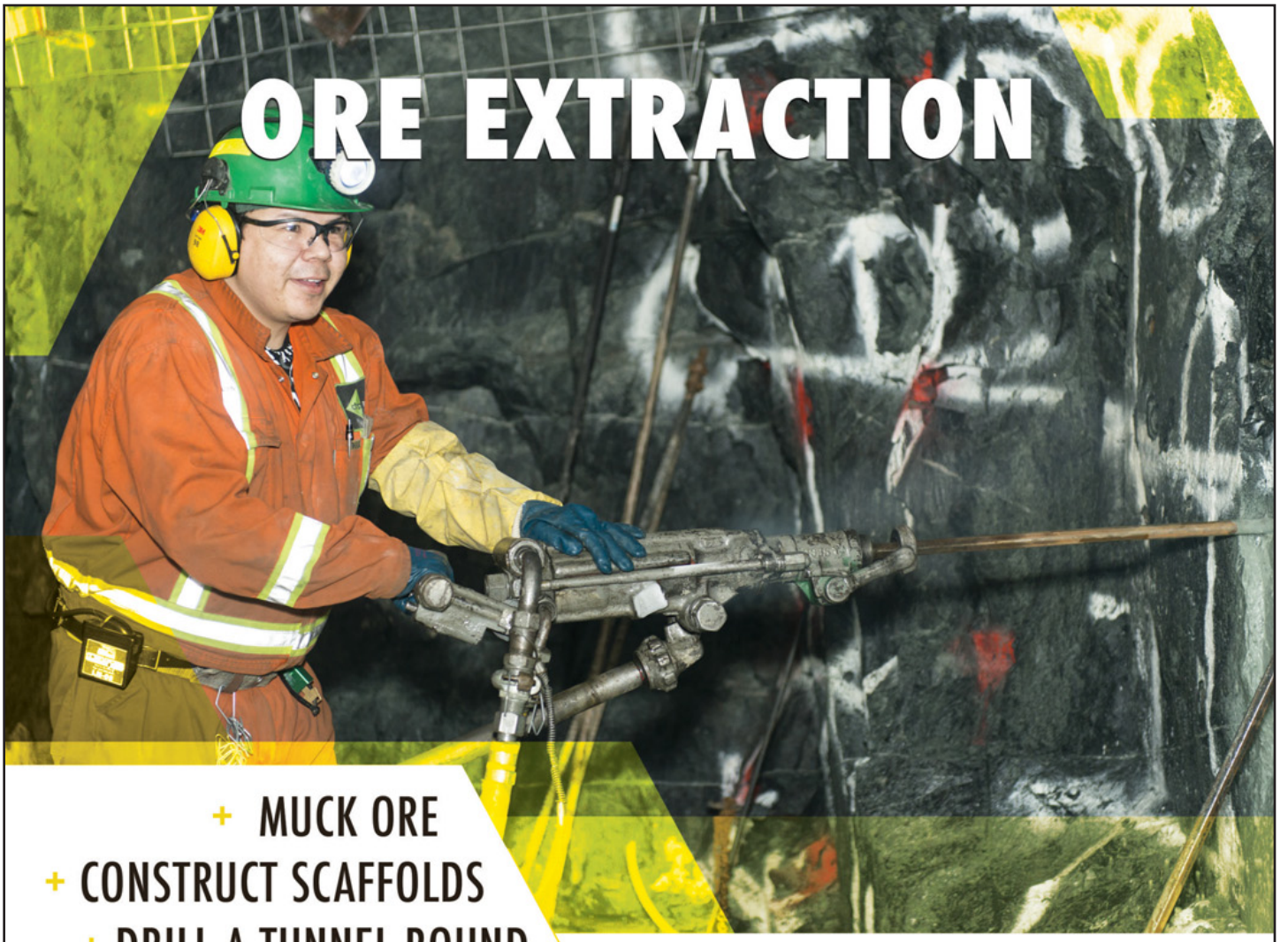
4) In terms of the PQ's offerings for Aboriginal voters, Ferland said he would continue to work to pursue the implementation of the Paix des Braves and see that the Cree participate as much as possible in taking advantage of its provisions and the economic development of the region.

5) Ferland said one of the biggest issues in the region in terms of economic development and the expansion of businesses is that there are very few tradesmen in the region who have received CCQ cards (to become masters of their trades by completing the allotted hours apprenticing under a master) and therefore many were missing out on economic opportunities.

Were he to be reelected, Ferland said he would work on this issue as well as to continue to work with the new regional government in Eeyou Istchee to ensure that there are "harmonious exchanges" between those sitting at the table.

6) In terms of stimulating the economy, Ferland said he would like to see the creation of a secretariat for an alliance between the Cree, the Jamesiens and the Inuit, that would focus on issues like economic development and forging partnerships.

While the PQ also have their Nord Pour Tous plan in place, he said the creation of a secretariat to represent the region would prove to be an ideal forum for exchange between all parties.



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7) On the issue of peace among the people, Ferland began to refer immediately to the PQ's proposed Charter of Values and Bill 60 which would see it come into law.

In terms of the people in his riding, however, he said that the Cree, the Inuit and the First Nations in Quebec as a whole should not be concerned with this law. He says it only concerns new immigrants to Quebec.

When pressed on the issue, as there are people from other nations who have in the past taken work in the north, Ferland made the following statement:

"But these people aren't new arrivals, when you talk about new arrivals, we are talking about immigrants and we mean people coming in from places like North Africa, South America and Europe. Bill 60 concerns only new immigrants. It does not concern anyone else and Bernard Drainville, Premier Marois and I have said that this project on ensuring that institutions are devoid of religion does not touch First Nations or Inuit in Quebec because Crees and Inuit are not new immigrants.

"So we can say that this whole project on Bill 60 does not touch First Nations in any way and this really does not concern them."

Jean Boucher, QLP

1) Boucher has spent the last seven years living in Kuujjuaq and he feels that he is well versed in the issues of the people in the north, particularly in Nunavik. At the same time, he said he is a good friend of NDP MP Romeo Saganash and he has learned from him about the Cree nation.

"I think that the last thing that the Cree people need is another referendum on Quebec sovereignty. This is why everyone should be interested in voting on April 7," said Boucher.

2) Boucher said the Liberal Party should be the choice right now, particularly for the Crees because the party can offer more stability than the PQ whose goal is clearly sovereignty.

"As far as the CAQ goes, I don't think that they have a real constitutional position. They may be in favour of Quebec separating at one time and then not and I don't think they are that concerned with First Nations issues," said Boucher.

Boucher said he comes from a place of understanding because he is married to a Montangais woman and has spent the last 14 years working for Habitat Métis du Nord, an organization that developed social housing for First Nations and Inuit living off reserve.

Jean Boucher, QLP

3) As far as a referendum goes, Boucher said it is all a waste of time because Quebec has so much more to gain from Canada.

"We have been part of Canada since the beginning and even if we were to become an independent country, it wouldn't solve any problems for Quebecers or Native peoples," he argued. "Pauline Marois said we will have a referendum when the people of Quebec are ready, but she doesn't seem to be able to say yes or no as to whether there will be one in the next mandate. Who will decide when Quebec is ready?"

4) In terms of Aboriginal voters, Boucher said a Liberal win would see the return of the Plan Nord but with new enhancements that would see more benefits for the local communities.

It would also see the creation of a new office for this development of the north as well as another government office for business development and opportunities for Natives and non-Natives alike so that small businesses can get a leg up when it comes to contracts.

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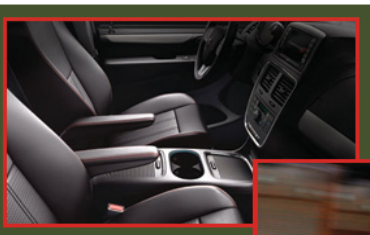

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5) According to Boucher, the biggest issue right now is political stability and the Plan Nord. "People need to work again. We need stability and to know where our government is going."

6) Naturally, Boucher supports the Liberal Party's Plan Nord but also said stabilizing the province will have added economic benefits.

7) "The way to peace and tolerance among people is very often by dispelling ignorance," said Boucher. "Among the Cree, Inuit and non-Aboriginal people, we need to create a climate of exchange and friendship where everybody knows where the other stands and also have an ideal atmosphere for collaboration between people. We are now in 2014, in the third millennium, and there is no place for racism or intolerance today. We all have to live on the same planet and breathe the same air and so we have to find a way to have a good relationship between each other."

André Richer, QS

1) "I worked and lived in Nunavik from 2001 until 2009 and then I worked part time, travelling throughout Nunavik, working in different communities and so I know the riding well," said Richer.

André Richer, QS

2) "For the Cree and the Inuit, we are all about establishing nation-to-nation relations with the Aboriginal peoples and the unrestricted application of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is something that QS supports," said Richer.

"It is important for us because QS is a people-oriented party and not money- or business-oriented. We are a progressive party and that means what is important for us is social programs to improve the wellbeing of the people."

3) Richer said since his party is openly sovereignist. "We would like to build a country that is not against anyone, but with everybody, including the Aboriginal people," said Richer.

4) As for Aboriginal voters, under the QS, Richer said First Nations and Inuit would have the right to self-determination over their political status and economic, social and cultural development.

"The First Peoples have never renounced their sovereignty either by treaty or otherwise. They continue to affirm their identity as a sovereign people and so Québec Solidaire recognizes the sovereignty of these Peoples. They must freely decide their own future and this is an inherent right. This reality must be recognized and there can not be a policy of two ways and two measures," said Richer. "The Québécois cannot refuse other peoples what they demand for themselves."

5) The most important issue in this election for the QS is to see a Quebec that is green, free and just.

According to Richer, his party is about working for a common good and this means a just redistribution of wealth throughout the province. The party is sovereignist, environmentalist, feminist, progressive and globally aware.

"This message is something that can reach everybody," said Richer.

6) According to Richer, the QS economic plan is to eliminate waste but he chose not to elaborate any further.

7) "Québec Solidaire does not like the ethnocentric part of the Charter of Values. We are for the idea of government being devoid of religion, as we believe that politics and religion must not mix.

"We are for that but we also want to be inclusive and not put aside anyone because of their religion. Our philosophy is to promote freedom of religion but this must not mix with politics. We are however inclusive and we want to include everybody. This is very important if you want to build a country and an independent state. This needs to be done with everybody and this is the most important thing," said Richer.

Heavy metal

Student heavy equipment operators are motivated to succeed in Sabtuan program

by Andi Christine Bednarzig

It was still dark at 6 am when Paul Paquette parked his white pickup truck in front of the Tim Hortons in Mistissini. He did a quick head count. All seven of his students were there, finishing breakfast or lining up for a coffee. This is where Paquette, instructor of the Northern Heavy Equipment Operations program, meets with his students from Monday to Friday.

Absenteeism has never been a problem. "My students are always here, ready to work, and willing to do overtime when they've missed time," he says. "If they are late, they offer to do overtime, even on weekends."

The Northern Heavy Equipment Operations program, offered by the Sabtuan Adult Education Services of the Cree School Board, provides educational and training opportunities for adults living in Cree communities. Upon completion of the program, graduates will obtain a diploma from the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. This will enable them to find work in the construction industry, in mines, in camps, or in the community. The popular program has a waiting list of 78 students and is considered one of the best employability programs.

The 900-hour-program takes place in a limited season and is dependent on weather conditions. Most learning occurs on site.

When not outside learning to operate heavy equipment, students are instructed in the basic principles of construction, road maintenance and maintenance of heavy equipment, as well as health and safety on construction sites. Theoretical learning constitutes 25% of the program.

Last October, students were working the morning shift, from 6 am to noon. A parallel program runs from noon to 6 pm, taught by Jacques Labelle. The weekly rotating schedule of the two courses maximizes the use of the heavy machinery.

Paquette spends most of his day driving from site to site to instruct and supervise his students, or just to offer encouragement and congratulations for a job well done.

Paquette's first stop was at the home of Leonard Coon and Kimberley Shecapio-Coon, where student Nelson Trapper was operating a backhoe. Trapper's job was to level the lot and remove stones in preparation for layers of topsoil and sod.

This type of on-the-job training benefits the community and gives the students first-hand experience.

At the inception of the program, on May 22, 2013, Paquette met with the Cree School Board's coordinator of vocational adult training, Luc Collette, to go over community work projects. Then Paquette chose the jobs from which students would benefit most in the program.

Paquette's team of students has worked on 18 different jobs since the beginning of the course.

At Trapper's worksite, Paquette observed as his student stepped out of the backhoe and squatted on the ground, gauging the angle of the slope with his eye, to ensure that water would drain away from the house.

"I like that!" Paquette exclaimed, giving Trapper a thumbs up. "For this job, you need a good eye for landscaping." Paquette is pleased when his students take charge of a project and show responsibility.

Homeowner Coon watched as Paquette and Nelson planted surveying sticks for the next step. There is some urgency, as sod is due to arrive the following day.

"We are very happy with the work," Coon said with a smile.

Paquette's students work a rotating daily schedule on assigned machines so that each student has the opportunity to work in different spheres with different machines.

At a nearby camp, Wayne Voyageur reshaped a camp road with a grader.

Working with heavy equipment is new to Voyageur. He heard about the course while working at the Mistissini Lodge. Not only is he learning to operate heavy equipment, but he is also learning routine maintenance procedures such as changing air filters, using water separators, and lubricating.

Voyageur's objective is to have a better career to support his family.

At another worksite, Marcel Gunner is operating a 6 x 6 articulator, an off-highway truck.

Gunner has experience working in construction and like other students has taken on jobs in the community.

During a recent job, students cleared land for Jerry Matoush, owner of the community's tire shop. Paquette explained that 114 loads of rocks and slashed trees were excavated.

When the students were paid, they teamed up to purchase jackets with the SAES crest and their names embroidered on them.

After giving further directions to Gunner, Paquette made a detour to the dry goods dump just outside of town. Neatly piled discarded appliances were the only indication of garbage. Paquette explained that this is a perfect place for students to practice their operating skills by digging holes and filling them with waste, and then piling gravel on top.

Paquette pulled out his cellphone to call student Matthew Bullfrog, who was working the loader that day. Paquette instructed him to load up the truck with topsoil and bring it to Trapper, who would level it in preparation for the grass that would be arriving the next day.

> "Paul is a very good teacher. He's interesting and I am learning a lot. He helps with everything. Only problem is that he's a Habs fan"
>
> Marcel Gunner

Paquette turned onto a road leading to a gravel pit, where Betsy Rabbitskin was filling a loader with gas from a parked service vehicle provided for that purpose.

The gravel for community projects comes from this quarry and is dynamited as needed.

Rabbitskin acted as observer for the day, since only six machines are available for the seven students.

As a child, Rabbitskin recalled, she liked to play with dolls, but also

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enjoyed playing with her brother's cars and trucks.

"I like them all," she replied when asked if she had a favourite machine. "I always knew I had it in me and that one day I would operate these machines."

Richard Cooper was operating a bulldozer when Paquette stopped by to see his progress. Cooper's day doesn't end at noon. After his school day is over, he goes to work, resulting in 12-hour workdays.

Like Gunner, Cooper works for other companies as an operator. Paquette explained that when students work for contractors, and get paid directly, it counts as part of their internship.

At another camp, Linda Loon was creating a system of drainage ditches to evacuate spring snowmelt runoff from nearby camps.

Loon climbed down from the excavator she was operating that day and came forward to greet Paquette. "Paul, I am so proud of myself," she said, pointing at a large boulder. "I got that rock out."

"Good job!" Paquette called to her, holding out his arms as in a giant embrace.

Linda had called Paquette earlier, when she was having a problem with a rock that was stuck. "I was afraid to tip over, so I did it slowly," she explained.

Just before departing, Paquette advised Loon to make holes about 10 paces apart along the side of the road and plant uprooted trees. This would make the road more visible in winter and provide definition. "It will look nice, too," he added.

Like Gunner and Cooper, Loon has worked for Cree communities. One of her jobs was at the dump at the nearby community of Oujé-Bougoumou.

Paquette stopped at Bullfrog's worksite. As instructed by Paquette 20 minutes earlier by phone, Bullfrog was loading a truck with topsoil to bring to Trapper.

Bullfrog admitted he was worried, at the onset of the course, about operating the machines and performing the required maintenance.

"But now it's almost second nature. I feel very comfortable with the machines now," he said.

Bullfrog's plan is to go outside the community to work for 14 consecutive days and then have two weeks off. He hopes to contribute to the community during the off time.

After completing the requirements of the program and obtaining their diploma, the students will register with the Commission de la construction du Québec (CCQ) as a step toward the certification required to work in the construction industry. They will obtain an apprenticeship card so their hours are logged in.

The CCQ has set conditions for hiring labour, with which construction companies must comply. Graduates must complete 2,000 hours through training and/or work experience.

Of the 900 hours students complete as part of the Northern Heavy Equipment Operations program, 165 hours of the SAES program are recognized toward these 2,000 hours, and graduates must make up the rest on the job.

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The end result is a certificate attesting to their competence, Le certificat de compétence-compagnon, allowing them to work in the construction industry.

In 1997, the CCQ put forth new regulations to promote women's access to the construction industry, as well as their retention, and to increase their numbers in this field.

Rabbitskin and Loon agree that they have not experienced any obstacles in taking on non-traditional workplace roles as women.

"People see me driving on the road and they go like this," Loon said, displaying a thumbs-up sign.

Loon's fascination with big machines began when she saw a woman operating a machine similar to the excavator she was operating that day.

She was surprised at first. "But then I looked and watched, and thought 'I'd love to do that -operate machines!'"

Rabbitskin also feels that the community is proud of "us women."

"They think it's awesome, cool being a woman driving these things," she said.

Job prospects are numerous. The money may be good for those working in mines and construction, but being away from the community and family, traveling long hours to and from the work place, and doing shift work can be definite drawbacks.

Some students, like Loon, would like to stay in the community to remain close to their families. Being closer to home, they may be hired by the band council for snow removal, landscaping and regular maintenance.

Other students, such as Cooper and Gunner, realize that money is to be made working outside the community in mines or in the construction industry.

A Trade and Training Process module is offered as part of the program to help students with their choices and job searches.

After finishing the program, Bullfrog hopes to find a mining job, perhaps at the Stornoway diamond mine. "They've already offered jobs to students," he noted.

The students agree that Paquette is a dedicated teacher, who helps them succeed in every aspect of the program.

"Paul is a very good teacher," Gunner said. "He's interesting and I am learning a lot. He helps with everything. Only problem is that he's a Habs fan," he joked.

Bullfrog admitted that at first he was scared of the heavy equipment.

"Paul showed me how to work with machines and I fell in love with them," he said. "He's comical and he uses analogies and makes things funny."

On the way back to Tim Hortons, Paquette drove past the homeowner's property where Trapper had been levelling the ground. Piles of topsoil had been unloaded by Bullfrog and were ready to be spread before the sod arrived the following day.

It was only noon and the students' shift was over, but Paquette knew his seven students would be waiting for him at 6 am the next morning, eager to start a new day.

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Eating healthy

The 2014 manger santé expo sets the foodie trend

by Amy German

All sorts of culinary innovations are hitting the market, each promising to make you a better person from the inside out. But what products are actually worth exploring and what are purely marketing fads?

The Nation visited the Montreal manger santé et vivre vert ("eat healthy and live green") exposition, which ran from March 21-23 at Palais de Congrès to give the taste test to food trends big and small.

While trends in previous years promoted the "super powers" of obscure berries or ancient grains, companies this year were pitching lifestyle changes based on eating better by going gluten free or by living vegan (eating no animal-based products).

Vegan themes were prominent this year, but let's acknowledge right off that this lifestyle would prove difficult for most people living in James Bay.

So we instead decided to focus simply on what tasted good. This is what we found.

The first kiosk we visited featured cheeses from Fromagerie Bergeron, a company that produces dairy products on the south shore of Montreal. Well known in the province for their Gouda, we sampled their new 6% light cheddar that featured a lovely chewiness and robust flavour.

The ladies representing the company said that they have been on the market for a few years and have been enlarging their distribution network. All natural and delightful, have a look for them!

Also in the cheese aisle, Bio Bio brand were handing out their different varieties. It should be noted that all of this company's products are 99.5% or completely lactose-free and organic. Increasingly available throughout the province, these artisanal cheeses were rich in flavour and have a lovely creamy quality. We sampled the old and mild cheddars and were hooked with one bite!

Attending this show means that you are often going to encounter products that you wouldn't normally serve on your dinner table. Bioseaweed was one of those innovations that had us doing a double take. While seaweed has been a nutritional favourite for some cultures for thousands of years (Japan), the typical North American may not be as convinced to put them on their table.

Displaying a large casserole dish of some less-than-appealing looking greens, Bioseaweed's pitch is that their seaweed is harvested at 30- to 40-metre depth, making it "pollution free" before maturity for maximum nutritive value.

"This seaweed has amazing properties for those looking to lose weight or for people with thyroid problems or are suffering from cancer," said a company representative who gave his name as Lee.

The seaweed snacks were tasty and no doubt nutritious as seaweed is jam packed with tons of vitamins and nutrients. But I'm not sure I shop in a store that sold only seaweed products.

Moving along, we met Francine who was handing out some rather fanciful gluten-free delight Way Better Snack. This consists of a corn chip made from sprouted grains. The product came out last year and is packed with things like chia seeds and quinoa as well as radish and broccoli seeds.

Simply Sweet Chili variety is a grainy tasting tortilla chip flavoured with a lovely trifecta of salt, sweet and spice. While the all-natural product contains more nutrients than your average Dorito, it should never be forgotten that it is sill a deep-fried treat from a crinkly bag loaded with salt and other wonderful things that make it tasty but not necessarily ideal for the waistline.

Next up we encountered the Made Good organic granola snack product stand, which featured all sorts of little bars geared towards the lunch bags of little people (children).

According to Peter from Made Good, these products are all organic, school safe (peanut-free) and feature a full serving of vegetables in each tiny bar. They're packed with the typical oats and other fruit goodies as well as things like vegetable powder with dried spinach, broccoli, carrots, toma-

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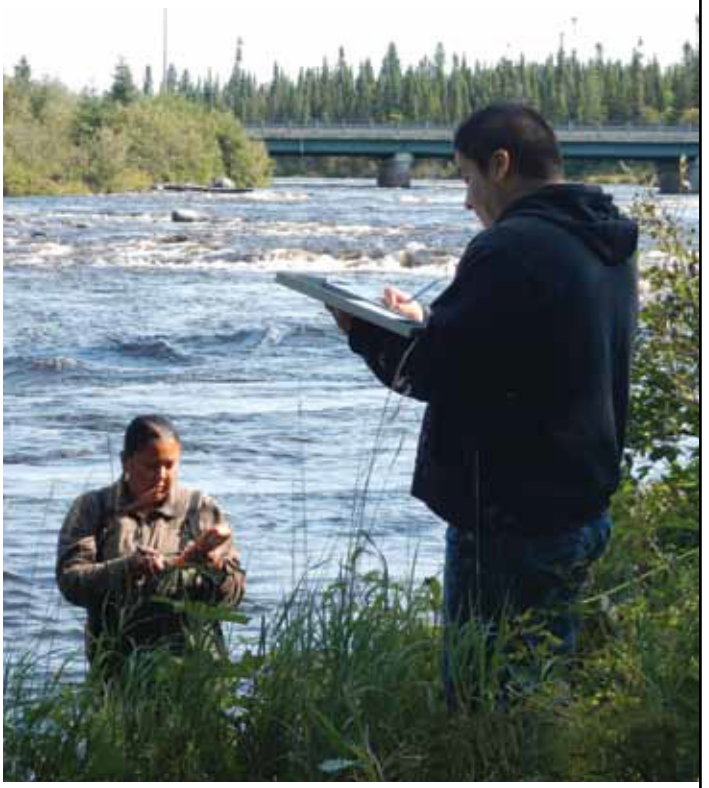

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toes and beets. The toddler we had on hand gobbled it right down. These little bars may actually be a good alternative for parents who have a hard time getting their wee ones to eat their greens. For this reason it was my favourite find of the day!

Anyone who has ever spent a collective five minutes watching a daytime TV health show will likely have heard of the health benefits of green tea. From being an antioxidant to a detoxifier to being packed in ultra healthy chlorophyll, this beverage exudes a healthy glow.

A part of Chinese culture for 5000 years, Matcha tea is quite different from the typical tea bag preparation as it made from a finely ground tea leaf powder that is heated and frothed with a special brush. This is exactly what was happening at the Do Matcha table so that everyone could taste the traditional preparation.

Invigorating, warming and also refreshing, I was happy to walk away with my sample cup of Do Matcha in hand and will definitely consider drinking more of the beverage.

If you are looking for something to zest up your favourite dishes and are a fan of "terroir" or local products, La Fin Fleur de la Tapani half-salt herb grinders and herb mixes are a good way to enhance your food in an all-natural way.

These products are made uniquely with freeze-dried garlic flowers giving them a garlicky edge. They are blended harmoniously with anything from citrus to fine herbs to chives to a pepper blend.

Great for a summer salad or just to perk up the tomatoes in your sandwich, we loved what we sampled here and would buy the product for home.

Of course, if you really want to go out with something fabulous to perk up your home cooking, a fine olive oil is another great way to go. For some, buying olive oils is on par with selecting fine wines and can be about as expensive.

While there were oils of just about every variety under the sun available for sampling at this show, nothing could compare to Chateau Virant, a $27 prize-winning olive oil from France. Chateau Virant is a "finishing oil," which means that it should never be heated but rather enjoyed as a condiment. Fragrant and grassy with a green artichoke flavour with just a hint of pepper, this product is one of the best sellers for its category in Canada and has won many culinary prizes in France.

Something else we found rather interesting was REELIV5, a specialty infusion beverage geared towards those suffering from things like arthritis, osteoarthritis, tendonitis, bursitis, sprains, fractures, sports injuries, inflammation and back pain.

While it really did kind of seem like the 5 Our Energy or Red Bull for the Baby Boomer generation, as it is a sports type "liquid nutrition" beverage for joint health, whether it is more than new fad in slick packaging remains to be seen.

The product contains homeopathic nutrients like glucosamine sulphate, chondroitin, Methyl Sulfonyl

Methane or MSM, collagen and Devil's Claw, all of which can be purchased at a health-food store. Whether the product actually contained enough of each of these to be effective as pain relievers is hard to judge as this product has to be taken daily over a period of time to be effective.

While it is an interesting concept and they do have Alexandre Tagliani as their spokesperson, hours after sampling the product, Nation editor-in-chief Will Nicholls had yet to notice a difference.

By Amy German

Colon conversations

New effort to raise awareness about threat of colorectal cancer

Raising awareness about colorectal cancer is a priority issue for the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay.

According to CBHSSJB statistics, the disease is now the most frequently diagnosed cancer in Eeyou Istchee, responsible for 12% of all new cancer cases. Since Eeyou Istchee's population size is small, the number of new cases of cancer is generally low: on average there are three new cases per year. However, this number has been on the rise since the 1990s. Now Eeyou Istchee faces the same colorectal cancer risk as the rest of Quebec.

At that, colorectal cancer is also the second leading cause of cancer-related death in Eeyou Istchee, as three people now die from the disease every two years.

However, according to Dr. David Dannenbaum of the CBHSSJB, colorectal cancer is entirely treatable provided it is detected early on, and the only way to do that is by going for screening tests.

The problem here is that often people feel that getting these tests done can be embarrassing and disgusting because they involve a stool sample.

While diagnosing colorectal cancer will always require a colonoscopy, which is a procedure that needs to be conducted by a professional in a medical setting, there is now a new and easy test to see if a patient should go for a colonoscopy.

Known as a fecal immunochemical test (FIT), it requires examination of one's feces.

According to Dannenbaum, the FIT simply requires a kit that will be provided by the local clinic. The patient receives a stick to collect a small sample of the fecal matter and then be placed in a plastic tube before being returned to the clinic.

Dannenbaum said the previous test required a patient to refrain from eating meat for three days and then collect three separate stools on three different days that had to be refrigerated. Those undergoing this test had a lot to manage, including the samples being near their food in their fridge.

While the FIT, which is going to be available throughout Eeyou Istchee as part of a provincial program, does not replace a colonoscopy, it is an indicator as to who should get one before the age of 50. All those aged 50 to 70 are recommended to have a colonoscopy, regardless as to whether there has been a family history of colon problems.

Just about everybody should be screened.

"When we screen for cancer, by definition you have no symptoms," said Dannenbaum. "Everybody we speak to will say that their stomach doesn't hurt, that their stools are normal and that they aren't losing weight and so why would I screen for cancer if I feel great?"

But Dannenbaum says this is exactly the person who should be screened for cancer. "It is really important to mention that it is the person who feels great, is out playing hockey at the age of 65, is out in the bush and is doing well overall who should be screened because when you catch it this early it is 100% treatable.The FIT is also for people who are at low risk for colon cancer, for everybody."

But, for those who actually do have a family history of colorectal cancer, it is recommended that they begin colonoscopy screenings 10 years prior to the age that their family member had it as a means of prevention.

One man's story

For Ontario Regional Chief Stan Beardy, living a life on the go as head of his community and then handling the health portfolio at the Assembly of First Nations has meant a lifestyle that was less than healthy. He couldn't always have three square meals a day or get as much sleep as he needed. After 10 years as Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Beardy's new job at the AFN hasn't given him any more downtime than his previous position.

It was for that specific reason that Beardy was rigorous about getting tested and seeing his family doctor on a regular basis.

Last August, he went for a routine colonoscopy and here's the story in his own words:

"When I woke up the doctor who was performing the test said that there was something that he wanted to tell me, that there was something in my colon and so they took some samples for a biopsy.

"I also had to go for a CT scan and then come back about two weeks later for the results as well as the results from the further blood work that they were doing because of this.

"On August 19, I went to the doctor as he had told me that he had the results. This was not my regular doctor but a specialist who had been performing the test on me. He said the test had come back and there was one area that was positive and it definitely was cancer and cancer cells on my colon.

"The doctor said it was in the very earliest of stages and it would be very helpful if I made the decision to have an operation to remove the two areas that looked suspicious – one was definitely positive, the other one could be as well. He said they wouldn't know how bad it actually was until they went in. But they had figured from the CT scan and the blood work and photos that it could be in stage one.

"The turnaround time for me was very quick from the time I went in for a routine test to having cancer surgery. They did major surgery on me on September 10 and I was out of commission for four weeks."

Beardy admits he was lucky because his cancer was caught early on so his treatment was simple. Had he been at home in the remote Muskrat Dam First Nation, it most likely wouldn't have happened that way.

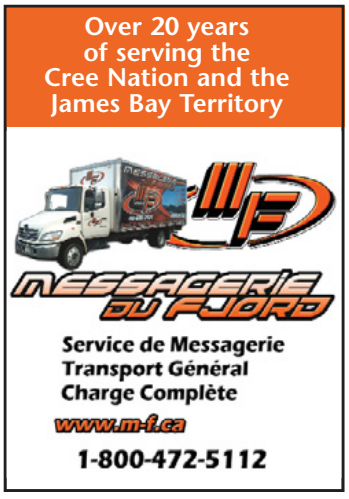
The problem with colorectal cancer is that symptoms often aren't felt until years down the line, at which point it is much harder to treat.

In Beardy's case, the doctors told him it would have taken about five or six years before he felt anything, at which point his cancer would have likely been stage four and possibly fatal.

It is for this reason that Beardy has started efforts to raise awareness about colorectal cancer among First Nations people, which includes finishing a video project with the AFN. In it, Beardy tells his story and talks about his community as well as access to medical care for those most in need of it, particularly Aboriginals in remote communities.

Launched on March 17, the video, Early Detection: The Path to a Good Life, can be viewed at www.tbrhsc.net/GoodLife.

"The problem with colorectal cancer is that symptoms often aren't felt until years down the line, at which point it is much harder to treat."



UNDER THE NORTHERN SKY

Swan song

by Xavier Kataquapit

A flock of great white tundra swans fly overhead. These Wah-pee-soo (Cree for swan) are easy to spot with their large bodies and long necks. They are majestic as they move through the air under the power of their great wings. In the north, it is rare for us to spot these beautiful and graceful birds during the spring migration. I am amazed as I watch this group of birds landing on a farmer's field here in southern Ontario. They join a greater flock of hundreds of other tundra swans as they noisily gather and collect the waste corn from last fall.

It is early spring on the north shore of Lake Erie near Long Point, Ontario, and much of the snow has melted. However, with the arrival of these large birds, the ground looks snow-covered with so many white-plumed swans waddling on the farm fields. The sight of so many white birds covering up the land with their plumage reminds me of what my dad and many Elders described up north during the spring goose hunt. Back in earlier times snow geese were so numerous in the north that when they arrived in the spring along the James Bay coast, these birds covered the land to make it look like winter again.

The sight of so many swans here these days is strange to me. On the James Bay coast, I remember spending my time on the land with my family during the spring goose hunt in late April and early May. It was normal for us to sit and watch hundreds of Canada geese and snow geese fly over our blinds on their way north. On some special days when the sun shone warm on the land and there was no sign of coming cold weather, thousands of geese would line the horizon as they followed the shoreline of James Bay on their way to northern nesting sites.

During these hunting trips on the land, it was rare to see swans. To most hunters they were an unusual bird that few people preferred to hunt. They didn't taste like geese and it seemed almost sacrilegious to kill them because they were so rare. We had plenty of geese to feed our families, so for most hunters swans were too unusual to add to a catch of geese.

When I first saw Wah-pee-soo during my time here near Long Point, I thought it was odd to see a flock of these birds flying in a group. I have only ever spotted them in pairs, as swans are famous for being monogamous birds that stick with their partners for life.

In the springtime, Long Point becomes an important destination for bird watchers and day tourists. I didn't discover until this year that Long Point is actually one of the most important staging areas for migrating tundra swans in North America.

These majestic birds leave North Carolina in February to fly north to their eventual nesting areas in the summer in the northern Prairie provinces. Once these great birds start their trip, they are capable of flying a total distance of roughly 1000 to 1450 kilometres in a short period.

Their first stop and halfway point from North Carolina is along the coast of Lake Erie and to one of their most important meetings areas at Long Point. For up to two weeks they replenish themselves on the rich farmland littered with waste grains and from wetlands full of nutrient-rich food. At Long Point and the north shore of Lake Erie, thousands of these birds gather in one of the most amazing displays of animal migrations in the world.

Once they have eaten their fill, they migrate a further 1,500 kilometres northwest to their nesting grounds in the northern prairies. They will eventually disperse to their own territories and fly in smaller groups or as pairs. Some travel to the coast of Hudson Bay and a few make it alongside migrating flocks of Canada geese to James Bay.

The great flocks of Wah-pee-soo have made the last few days very exciting. They remind me of the magical bond that exists between the Cree and birds like the goose, swan and eagle. Tonight I drove on a road that wound through hundreds of Wah-pee-soo and I honked my horn in rapid bursts to let them know I was around. Passing motorists must have wondered at my honking but I like to think that the great white swans all around me took it as a gentle greeting from this crazy Cree of the James Bay lowlands.

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